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MINISTERING TO THE ELDERLY:

Perspectives and Opportunities

Edited by: The Rev. Prof. John H. Morgan, Ph.D., D.D.
Director, Institute on Ministry and the Elderly

Preface by: The Rev. Prof. Seward Hiltner, Ph.D.
Princeton Theological Seminary

Essays by: Prof. Helena Znaniecki Lopata, Ph.D.
Loyola University of Chicago

The Rev. Prof. William B. Oglesby, Jr., Ph.D.
Union Theological Seminary of Virginia

The Rev. Robert D. Wheelock, OFM, Cap., M.A.
Catholic Hospital Association

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INSTITUTE on MINISTRY and the ELDERLY

DIRECTOR: The Rev. John H. Morgan, Ph.D., D.D.
Associate Professor and Chair,
Department of Sociology
Kansas Newman College

THE NEED At no time in the history of the Church has there been a better opportunity to minister to the elderly than today. With the Church's increasing sensitivity to the spiritual needs of mankind in all his social, cultural, economic and psychological groups has come a concomitant advance in man's ever-growing breadth and depth of knowledge in the life sciences. Resulting from this happy increase in spiritual sensitivity and human understanding is an opportunity of incomparable potential for Christian stewardship.

THE PURPOSE The implications of this timely moment in the Church's life are far from being envisaged---by any individual, any group, any church. However, there is a growing national awareness of this timely moment expressed in countless innovative and provocative experiments in local community stewardship. The Institute on Ministry and the Elderly is a three-pronged adventure in ministry particularly conceived of in the context of needs and concerns of the elderly. By calling for and nurturing the corporately shared insights of pastoral leaders and social scientists, the Institute is realizing its primary purpose of initiating, fostering, and sponsoring a deeper and more responsibly representative understanding of the Church's ministry to the elderly in modern times.

THE ACTIVITY The activities initiated and sponsored by the Institute include:

I. Workshops.....which are designed to facilitate creative dialogue among religious and medical leaders, social scientists and social service professionals, and interested laymen;
II. Publications...which take the form of either collected essays by nationally recognized scholars or research bibliographies on particularly timely and urgent subjects brought out as the I.M.E. Monograph Series, edited by John H. Morgan; and
III. Research.....which is directed toward a better understanding of the major issues confronting the Church in the modern world.

THE HOPE The Institute on Ministry and the Elderly is an illustration of the hope currently characterizing the Church as the Church attempts to recognize and respond to the numerous and diverse needs of the elderly in modern society. To the extent that the Institute is instrumental in facilitating a better understanding of the Church's mission to the elderly and all those in spiritual and physical need, this Institute will have accomplished its goal.

*The I.M.E. is thoroughly non-denominational in its activities and staff.

FOREWORD

By Seward Hiltner
(Princeton Theological Seminary)

Kansas Newman College is to be warmly congratulated for the series that made this book possible. Although the volume is short, it performs three valuable functions. First, it provides basic background for understanding the dilemma confronted by older people -- or the elderly -- in the United States today. Second, it presents an imaginative analysis of what the clergy and other religious may do in relation to older people in light of the needs. Third, it offers suggestions as to how some of the current needs of older people may be met by the volunteer service of church members, men and women, who are not clergy.

The Christian churches, Catholic and Protestant, have not lacked concern for older people. The churches maintain, and usually subsidize in part, hundreds of institutions for older people, usually called "homes," whether or not their quality deserves the latter world. Most of these institutions continue to be upgraded in quality; Social Security and other pension plans enable them to accept residents today who need their services and who, in earlier years, might have been rejected on budgetary grounds; and more of them are developing facilities for medical and nursing care so that their residents do not have to be ejected if they develop some chronic illness. Such institutions may still perform valuable and humane service for their residents. At the very least, they should be able to set a standard for both the technical and humane aspects of the care of residents that would challenge the quality of care, often inferior, that exists in commercially operated institutions or so-called "nursing homes."

It is seldom realized, however, how small a proportion of older people are in such institutions -- a figure estimated at about five per cent. Most experts believe, furthermore, that the needs of most of the other 95% of older people can be met better in other residential settings than institutions. Only about 20% of older people have handicaps that impede their getting around freely on their own. Older people, by and large, need little or no more hospitalization than do people in the middle years. Therefore, more institutions for older people cannot be the churches' answer to the needs.

Like the society of which they are a part, the churches in America have not been free of what could be called a "priest and Levite" complex in relation to older people. In the story of the Good Samaritan, when the Jew who had been robbed and beaten was lying by the side of the road, the priest and the Levite passed by on the other side, and it remained for the Samaritan to get the injured man to the ancient equivalent of a hospital. As Jesus told the story, its point was that the close kinship

ties that the injured Jew had with the priest and the Levite was not enough to get them close enough to him to do what was needed; whereas the Samaritan, without the same close ties, nevertheless did what was required. It is even possible that the priest and the Levite were on their way to a conference on crime control. But they shrank from direct contact or involvement with the person in immediate need.

So far as the needs of most older people today can be met by clergy and churches -- and that area is very large and important -- that ministry is in congregations, parishes, neighborhoods, communities, towns, villages, and cities -- not mainly "on the other side." The older people are not "out there." They are "here," they are "close by." No matter what Washington or the state capitol or the mayor or the town council do, many of their most basic needs will not be met unless we minister directly to them, and elicit their own gifts of ministry as colleagues in ministering to others.

Why is it that we are strongly tempted to pass by on the other side of older people? The primary reason is our inner reluctance to face the fact that we are ourselves in process of aging, whether we are 60 or 45 or 25. Especially in American society, the aging process itself is judged, quite undeservedly, to be simply a bad thing. It is true that there tend to be some losses in aging. Few people at 50 can run as far and as fast as they could at 20. Not many people in their eighties are as spry as they were at 50. But then few teenagers are as double jointed as they were in babyhood. Except for a relatively slow decline in certain physical powers, and even those vary greatly among persons, the serious losses in aging -- like isolation or rejection or meaninglessness -- are not the result of the aging process but of the way in which older people are treated.

Except for the relatively small proportion of older people who have serious illnesses or handicaps (which some persons may have at any age), the older years are capable of bringing many benefits especially in the psychological and spiritual realms, if society permits and encourages older people to fulfill their potentialities. Jews regard the older years as the sabbath of life in which persons may be more free than before to invest their energies in the most important things of life, and thus in a special way to praise God as well. Since Christians borrowed about three-fourths of our Bible from the Jews, perhaps we can learn to borrow from them also the sabbath idea about older years.

It is not easy for us to absorb the facts about the numbers of older people in our society, as they are now and as they will be a few years in the future. Considerable help on this point is provided in the chapter by Helena Z. Lopata; but it is well for the reader to have the main facts in mind at the beginning of reading. Today about one-tenth of the United States population is over 65 years of age. Such a proportion is radically new in human history. Until well into the nineteenth century, perhaps half or more of all the babies born died at birth or during their first year; and those who survived died, on the average, somewhere between ages 40 and 50. Today the average girl baby is expected to live to her mid-seventies, and the average boy until nearly 70. Medicine, public health,

better nutrition, and the decrease in back-breaking labor are mainly responsible for the change.

Population experts suggest that (unless we have large groups of immigrants, which seems unlikely) the number and proportion of older people in America will grow a little bit each year for the next 25 or 30 years; and of course every significant new medical finding will increase that number. But at about the time we enter the twenty-first century there will be a kind of explosion of older people. For that is the time when the people who arrived with the "baby boom" of World War II will begin to reach 60 or 65 years of age. That boom lasted for about 25 years, from about 1940 to about 1965. So the explosion is scheduled to begin about 2005, and will last at least until 2030.

Since the increases in the older population will be gradual for about the next 30 years, it will be very easy for both society and the churches to be lulled into a false sense of security about what is being done in relation to older people. Keeping the future explosion in mind may provide a safeguard against such complacency.

What will American society do as its older population grows slowly over the next thirty years and then grows rapidly for the following thirty years and then grows rapidly for the following thirty years? From the point of view of economics, there should be no real problem, since the number of children is declining at the same time the number of older people is increasing; and thus there should be little net change in the number of persons to be supported by those who engage in economically productive work. Besides, many older people prefer to continue such work themselves, on a full time or part time basis, if they are not barred from doing so.

But our society has not yet clearly made up its mind that older people are worth while. Even the present levels of social security benefits tend to be begrudged, although many older people are heavily or completely dependent upon them. Yet the beneficiaries worked for their benefits. Further, in a time like the present when jobs seem in short supply, many older people are either forced or strongly urged to get out of the job market, even when they are quite capable of working and wish to continue. Such policies affect persons in every economic bracket except perhaps the very rich.

That society should put positive value on older people would seem to be a moral imperative, resting both upon the ideals of our country's founding fathers and also, for Christians as well as Jews, upon the worth of every person in the sight of God. Perhaps church people can take a lead in affirming, for our whole society, the proper value that is to be placed upon older people. We should be cautious against discouragement if the fully positive valuation does not appear overnight. Even in societies that have been predominantly Christian, it is only slowly and relatively recently that a positive valuation has been placed on children. We are not much more than a generation beyond exploitative forms of child labor. The child's right to elementary education is not much more than a century old. And the right of children to be specially helped by appropriate agencies of society in such dire events as loss of parents,

severe handicaps, or abuse is more recent than that. So some patience is needed, and some hope is justified, while we work for a fully positive valuation of older people by our society.

The chapter by Helena Z. Lopata emphasizes the special problems that older women have today. One reason for this stress is that the proportion of women in the population increases with age. The other reason is that many older women learned their roles in settings quite different from those where they now find themselves. Many were reared abroad or in rural surroundings. She calls them a kind of "invisible minority," because they often adapt passively or even fatalistically to their current situation, even when resources exist that could assist them with their problems. Older men, she notes, usually make better use of the existing resources than do women, for their social roles have changed less than those of women. Yet men may find it difficult to change roles from productive worker to retiree, and may acquiesce too easily into a self-appraisal of being "on the shelf."

Lopata's finding that most older women live alone, and that most older widows confine themselves to contact with their children, is perhaps not unexpected. But the revelation that very few of them make any reference to clergy or fellow church members is shocking. Apparently the principal failure of the church in relation to older people has been right in the neighborhood and congregation.

In addressing his chapter to the question of what the churches, especially the clergy, may do to minister to older people, William B. Oglesby, Jr., emphasizes throughout that "nothing can substitute for first-hand engagement." Even for clergy, it is not easy to put oneself empathically in the shoes of the particular older person, and try to view life as he or she does. But unless this is done, Oglesby continues, no amount of programs will genuinely meet whatever needs there are.

The basic task of church and pastor in relation to older people, Oglesby argues, in modern language, is to supply an appropriate "support group." Older people, he notes, are not peculiar in needing at times a pastor "to stand with them in time of struggle and difficulty." We need to remember, however, he suggests, that it is not easy for any of us to admit such needs. To recognize that pastors too do not always have "the resources to walk through the tangles of life," that they also need sometimes to be ministered to, can be in itself a basic preparation for ministry to older people.

Oglesby's chapter also reminds us of some of the dimensions of Christian faith that underlie ministry to older people. Our valuation of persons at any age is because they are created by God, and not, for instance, just because they are economically productive. He notes too that, from a Christian perspective, every point in life is a stage in the total pilgrimage, to be valued and supported as needed by the religious community. The "capacity for renewal and blessing," in a religious sense, never ends.

The chapter by Robert D. Wheelock concentrates on what lay Christians may do to minister to the needs of older people. Although his discussion

is loosely constructed, in contrast to the other chapters, his experience-based suggestions about programs can provide an excellent starting point for any congregation seriously concerned to plan a useful ministry to older people. Here is a brief summary of his suggestions.

1. Exercise a kind of "watchdog" function in relation to the community and other programs for older people. Do they do what they say they are doing, and what they are supposed to do?
2. Make some kind of study or survey of the most important needs of older people in your particular congregation and neighborhood, for specific needs may vary from place to place.
3. If they are needed, plan programs of helping older people with some of their day by day needs. Such needs might include: help with shopping for food, lawn care, snow removal, provision of home equipment such as rails for a bathtub, and many others.
4. Since even Medicare does not usually make provision for dental care, eyeglasses, or hearing aids, help on such matters may be widely needed.
5. Provision of counseling or helping services by "expert laymen" on matters like taxes, insurance, community resources, and the like.
6. The creation of clubs to foster types of activities that older people want but will not undertake without assistance.
7. Provision for education of older people about the aging process.
8. Enlisting and encouraging older people to engage in volunteer service in or beyond the church, as a measure of their service as Christians.

I commend this volume equally to priests and ministers, and to all Christian men and women.

THE OLDER AMERICAN: SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS

By Helena Znaniecki Lopata
(Center for the Comparative Study
of Social Roles
Loyola University of Chicago)

Thank you for the opportunity to present some of the results of my research on American urban widows and related information on older people of all marital situations. The purpose of my presentation is to outline some of the problems and needs of older Americans, as well as some of the ways in which the society and the communities within which they live may be of help to them. There are two major points I would like to stress in this presentation. The first point is that this segment of American population is very heterogeneous so that community activities directed at one-group are not necessarily relevant or helpful to other groups. The second point of emphasis is on the historical uniqueness of many members of these generations of older Americans living in the 1970's and the decreasing probability that the solutions designed to allow them to live full lives will be needed in the same intensity in the future. The age cohort of Americans 60 years and older, comprising more than one generation, is unique in many ways and its problems and needs will not be reproduced with the same frequency in future generations. Thus, fear of burdening the society's future in order to help the currently older person should be minimal.

Historical Background

The older Americans are unique in that they have been caught between two styles of life, the one in which they were socialized and educated and the one in which they are now living. Obviously, this can be said of many groups of people who live for an extended period of time. However, the rate of change in America during the last six decades is so rapid and life is so different that socialization prior to World War I has made many people incompetent to live in the world we have now created. Many of the elderly were born in rural areas of other countries or in non-urban parts of the United States, into families idealizing unquestioning obdience by the majority of people, family-limited life, and only personal support systems. The women were socialized to be women in the traditional meaning of the term, to prepare in the home of their parents for becoming housewives in their own homes. The men were expected to be the bradwinners, the women the homemakers, bearers and carers of children. At the turn of the century, the men inherited land and tools of work and passed them on to succeeding generations; the average woman was dead before the last child left home, those who survived living ideally with the husband or the adult son (Duvall, 1967). For most of the history of mankind, the husband's family line was expected to take care of the widow if the

husband died first and the children were small, this care later being taken over by one of the surviving children (Bohannan, 1963). Communities were relatively stable, expanding through immigration but retaining old neighbors for many years. Thus, all but the elite men and women were socialized into ascribed, that is, non-volunteristic support systems of which they were an integral economic and social part. Their contributions to the family and community varied by sex, age and social class, but roles were traditional and the life cycle laid out in anticipated stages. Because of the shortage of women due to the male-predominant immigration patterns, all women had a high prestige value, widows faced a good probability of remarriage and social norms decreed that women had male protectors and connecting links to the outer society. Any paid employment which women undertook was done in the home often with the help of the children. The Puritan ethic restricted the life space of women, and class status that of men.

Rapid urbanization, industrialization and increasing society size and complexity of recent decades (Winch and Blumber, 1968) were spurred on by purposeful social change in the focal institution, the economic one. Family roles and relations in American society had to adjust to these social changes, resulting in the breaking up of the power of, and intensity of contact with, the male family line (Lopata, 1972). The freeing of man from the power of his family line actually began over two centuries ago in Europe, as soon as he was able to obtain the necessary training, tools of work and economic supports away from the home of his father. With these social movements, assisted by mass education and the increasing power of the political and large-scale economic organizations, the man was able to move away from the ancestral home, marry by choice and set up his own household (Aries, 1965).

These social movements, while freeing the man, constrained the social world of the woman. In prior centuries women were a part of a large work group and household; now they became the sole adult managers of their own restricted households to which the man and the post-infant returned only after taking part in the life outside of its walls. The isolated nuclear family, with limited ties to the extended kinship group, organized into its own households, and to neighbors became idealized in the America of the past few decades (Parsons, 1943). The keeper of its hearth became the adult woman alone and her connection with societal life, which no longer flowed through the home as work and power left it, became vicarious mainly through the husband and the school aged child.

Although there are recent changes in ages at marriage and parenthood, the average American woman married at age 20 to a man slightly more than two years older than she. She had her first child at age 22, her last child at age 26, and was faced with an "empty nest" when the last child left home while she was only 46 (Duvall, 1967; Lopata, 1969, 1971a). Medical advances have cut the rate of death not only of women in childbirth but also of infants and children. They have also added years of energetic and healthy life to the wife-mother, so that she can be expected to live in her household with only the husband for 15-16 years and alone for another 15-16 years (Duvall, 1967). Thus the average American woman is still in vigorous adulthood at a time when her husband and children are either busy with their own activities outside of the home or absent from

it and she spends many years of her life in this situation. These facts are consequences of the American habit of compressing so many major events in the first third of the life cycle and of its insistance that the male be the only breadwinner once his wife becomes a mother and that family rhythms, location and roles be adjusted to his economic role.

This emphasis on the economic sphere of life efficiently assisted the building of a complex and very affluent -- compared with most of the rest of the world -- society, but it has taken its toll in the lives of many of its members. Men are pushed to decide on an occupation in early youth, and then to plug into the economic sphere of life. They have to continue in it without stop till retirement because they must support income unproductive wives and children, surrounded by numerous economic goods which must be purchased and maintained. Women are prepared in schools in a manner similar to that of men, but warned not to take too seriously commitment to social roles external to the household because of the priority of their future or present roles of wife, mother and homemaker. Girls are not prepared to re-enter the labor market and other roles outside the home, even in face of the statistical probability of their becoming divorced or widowed, or both, and of their having inadequate economic supports without their own efforts.

This situation can be expected to change dramatically among the current and future cohorts of Americans. There appear to be strong shifts in women's commitment to roles outside of the home, as more and more young women become more educated, middle class, and influenced by the women's movement. In fact, even the middle-aged American women have been staging a quiet revolution in the last years, re-entering education and occupational organizations in staggering numbers (see the Labor Department's Women's Bureau Handbook on Women Workers, 1969). In spite of these changes, there remains a large number of women aged 50 and over who have not been able to engage in roles outside of the home in an appropriate way, as defined by the structure of modern society. They have never been trained to take the initiative in social engagement, to analyze their needs and the societal resources which may meet them, to plan steps of action necessary for the utilization of such resources, to undertake these steps and to flexibly change definitions and behavior as their life circumstances change. They have relied on automatically engrossing support systems, dependent on the husband as the connecting link between them and the society outside of the narrow circle of relatives and friends involved in these support systems. Events which disorganize these support systems find them incapable of creating new ones. Men underutilize education, rational job search methods and career plans. Simultaneously, their over-emphasis on the job makes forced leisure and forced retirement and widowhood difficult for these men because they lack the social skills to function in other areas of life (Berardo, 1968). It is this lack of social skills of these historical generations of older people which led Cumming and Henry (1961) to their theory of voluntary disengagement between society and the person as he or she grows older. What is voluntary, if you want to call it that, in the disengagement of traditional older Americans is their unwillingness to change their whole personality so drastically as to enable them to build a multi-dimensional, independent life after a dependent personality is made dysfunctional by the death of the person upon whom it depended or by retirement from a job (Lopata, 1971b; 1972b).

We are currently faced by two or so generations of American women many of whom are in no way trained to spend 15-16 years relatively functionlessly while the husband is still living but busy with his work outside of the home, but especially to spend 15-16 years as widows. We are simultaneously faced by men who die in their 60's or retire and feel functionless. The traditional support systems of family and neighborhood in many American communities have dissolved. The children leave home, scattered in other neighborhoods, suburbs, and even other cities; parents are dead, siblings no longer form viable resources, friends are dispersed or even dead, neighbors are strangers, churches and voluntary associations often lack familiarity and comfort. With the death of the spouse, the elderly person loses the companionship and the feeling of being important at least to one other human being (even if it is conflictful importance), the need person around whom one must organize the daily routine and all the other features of life, whose absence creates loneliness and forces one into changes in other spheres of activity (Lopata, 1969). Contact with in-laws usually diminishes considerably in both widowhood or divorce (Marris, 1959), strain with couple companionate friends is introduced by feelings of being a "fifth wheel;" companions and work-connected events are removed from contact. Few widowed or divorced elderly want to stop being managers of their own households in order to move in with married daughters, and certainly not with a daughter-in-law (Lopata, 1973a; Chevan and Korsan, 1972, 1975).

In sum, many of the present day elderly who had been socialized into traditional work and family roles and who are no longer actively involved in the performance of these roles, face many status and personal problems and social isolation, or at least inadquate support systems. They were socialized in non-urban settings and never developed in their minds a "map" of resources in the communities in which they are now living in order to be able to utilize these resources to meet their needs (see Lopata, 1975a, "The Support Systems of Elderly Urbanites, Chicago of the 1970's"). The most needful older Americans have minimal formal schooling so that they do not even understand the complexity of the social system and of their community, let alone being able to utilize the web of resources the society has been developing for its members. The women were socialized into femininity when the ideal was that of passivity vis-a-vis the rest of the world; the men were socialized into being workers, then retired. Many are poor because they or their spouse did not earn a high income when living, had their savings wiped out through inflation and did not qualify for large amounts of social security. They lack traditional support systems, yet they do not have the ability to build new ones. Many have had their lives disorganized by the death or desertion of the spouse, or by divorce. Many of the most disadvantaged elderly are members of minority groups-- the blacks,the Spanish-speaking or other first and second generation ethnics.

Most of the elderly are women, in fact, widowed women, so most of my comments will refer to this aggregate. Only 4-5 percent of the elderly are institutionalized, so my comments will refer to those who could utilize societal resources in the form of social, service and emotional support systems. I hope to document that the greatest needs of the elderly, particularly of the older widows, is this lack of ability to enter new roles when old ones are no longer active or need-satisfying

in the southern States of America, among the whites in the countries of Europe. As we shall document later, formal education has a direct effect upon social isolation among women. What we have documented thus far is that the older the person, the less educated he or she probably is. The older the person, also, the more probably she or he is or has been widowed. This is particularly true of women. The combination of these figures leaves us with a population of older people who are apt to be women, widowed and minimally educated.

Widows were heads of 2,325,000 families in 1960 and of 2,468,000 families in 1972. The majority of these women are older, meaning 65 years of age or over, and the number increases steadily by age, from a low of 1,300 for widows aged 18-24 to the high of 964,000 for widows aged 65 and over. Looking at the older widows only, we find that most are heads of households in which they are the primary individual (80 percent) and the only resident (77 percent). Only one-fifth of the 4,842,000 widows aged 65 and older are heads of primary families and three percent are heads of households containing non-relatives. In other words, most older widows live alone. Those who are not heads of their own households are mainly living in domiciles headed by a member of a family, only eight percent living in households headed by secondary individuals. The proportions of older widows living alone, or in families and with secondary individuals but not as heads of households have increased since 1968.

The widows, older and minimally educated as they tend to be, are not often able to earn an income through their own efforts, only a little more than one-fourth of all women known to have been widowed and currently widowed being able to do so. In addition, those who worked are, and have been, in bottom rung occupations. Although forming only 14 percent of the American female population aged 14 years or older, they form 32 percent of private household workers, 27 percent of farmers and 16 percent of service workers outside of the household employees. On the other hand they also form 19 percent of managers and officials, often inheriting a business from the husband, and 18 percent of craftsmen or foremen. The latter concentration is mainly contributed to by the length of their current working period. Widows are located at both extremes of the income continuum, when compared to other women whose own income, rather than that of the total family, is compared. Sixty-eight percent of American women who list no income are married, with husband present, although they form only 57 percent of the female population of these ages. The widowed are overly represented by far in the $1,000 to $2,999 as well as in the $15,000 or higher income categories. Thus, they either have good sources of income in the form of wages or social security or combinations of sources, or the- are living minimally. Most disadvantaged are the elderly widows who are not at all entitled for social security benefits and those who are now ineligible because of their age or the absence of dependent children but who lack the skills to obtain and hold jobs which would keep them above the poverty level.

The Research

Further comments as to the utilization of community resources and the support systems of the elderly people in America are based on three specific studies. The first, entitled the "Chicago Needs Assessment

Survey" (1973), was developed by the Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens in Chicago and conducted by Kirchner Associates. It focussed on the awareness and utilization of resources of the city designed to meet the needs which elderly people define themselves as having. The second is a study of role changes in the lives of women introduced by widowhood. It was funded by the Administration on Aging (Grant No. AA-4-67-030-01-A1) with the cooperation of Roosevelt University and originated by me. It consisted of extensive interviews with a modified area probability sample of 301 widows living in metropolitan Chicago, aged 50 and over, about half of whom were aged 65 and over. The third study, focussing on the support systems of widows in urbanized areas, under contract with the Social Security Administration (#SSA-71-3411), with the cooperation of Loyola University of Chicago, involved interviews with 1,169 current or former beneficiaries of social security. The list was stratified by beneficiary category and, when weighted, represents 82,085 widows in metropolitan Chicago.

The Chicago area needs survey does not point to extensive awareness or active utilization by the elderly of a variety of resources as well as to internal differentiation in the population. Men were more actively aware and utilizing of both indoor and outdoor activity and service resources than were women, the more educated more than the less and the whites more than the blacks (see original Lopata paer, "Life Styles of Elderly Urbanites, Chicago or the 1970's"). The study of elderly widows documented a strong association between social isolation, measured by the number of contacts with a variety of significant others and social groups and the formal schooling of the woman. In addition, both widowhood studies indicate an association between place of birth and social integration. Many of the Chicago area white widows were born outside of the United States or were brought up in ethnic communities by foreign-born parents; almost all of the non-white women were born outside of Illinois, usua-ly in southern States. Those born outside of the Chicago area, particularly abroad or in southern States, had less formal schooling and less of an ability to integrate volunteeristically in the urban setting, so that their support systems were very limited. Many of the limited social life space women identify with an ethnic group, but are no longer living in ethnically integrated neighborhoods which match their identity. Many have moved and never developed close ties with a church.

Another constraining factor upon the social integration of Chicago area widows is their current income and the limited sources they have for obtaining funds. White widows suffer a greater drop as a result of their husband's illness and death than do the black widows, but that is only because the latter had less to begin with. Black widows are highly dependent upon social security, without which they are in serious poverty and even its contribution does not always pull them out. Few of the widows have been able to bring in any significant money from their own wages or prior work's benefits. Few have investments, rental income, pensions, or other funds. Thus there is a combined package of factors restricting the older Chicago area, and American widows: a non-urban, non-industrial background, minimal if any schooling, marriage to an equally limited man, early widowhood without the resources for building new support systems in spite of resources existing in the society at large.

Not only do the older widows have restricted incomes coming in from restricted sources, but they have rarely developed economic support systems with other people which involve the giving or receiving of money as gifts, payment or help in payment of rent, food, clothing, medical or vacation expenses, etc. Thus, there are no financial replacements for limited income. Nor are they involved in extensive exchanges of service supports. Seventy percent get no help with shopping, 75 percent with housekeeping, 50 percent with household repairs, 59 percent with transportation, 62 percent with hard work and 75 percent with care of the car. The main support which they both receive and give is care during illness, 55 percent being recipients and 46 percent being givers of this service. The Chicago area widows are often not involved in social activities selected from those listed in pre-tests. Over half claim never to go to public places such as movies, or to engage in sports, cards, or games. Forty percent do not entertain or travel out of town, 37 percent never eat lunch in the company of others, 24 percent never go to church and 21 percent never visit. The one activity they share with others is the celebration of holidays, but even here 6,508 widows claim not to engage in such an activity.

All in all, our studies of widows find many who are relatively socially isolated, a majority who limit their lives to contact with children. When given 195 chances to list some person or group as being involved in 65 different supports, these women often do not take the chance, and very many list only the late husband, when asked about the sources of emotional supports the year before his fatal illness or death, or oneself or "no one." The most frequent appearance in the support systems is made by the children, often mainly one child, of the widow. Friends appear in the social support system, they are people one does things with, but this activity does not translate itself into involvement in the emotional support systems. Few women list friends as people closest to them, whom they most enjoy being with, to whom they tell their problems or would turn to in crisis. Friends do not even supply the self-feelings of being important, useful, independent, and so forth, to many widows. Surprisingly, siblings and relatives other than children also do not a-pear often in the support systems. This includes grandchildren. Most parents are already dead by the time the woman becomes widowed.

One of the very obvious and strongly recurrent conclusions of the study of the support systems involving widows as they were trying to build new lives after the death of the husband is the absence of the "helping professions" or associations. Even ministers, priests or rabbis are mentioned rarely; when they appear it is often as persons who failed to provide the wanted or needed help. Voluntary associations are often defined as "never" or "rarely" helpful during the life re-building period. The resultant absence of people other than children, who are often providing services from a separate household within which they are involved with their own families, and the limited number of social roles and activities in which so many widows are engaged lead to two other conclusions. The first is the relative independence of American urban widows. Their own work, or that of their late husband, provides at least minimal income so that welfare or other economic supports from more personal sources are not demanded, or at least they survive without them.

A second conclusion is that many widows have not developed innovative new support systems to replace the late husband who seems to have provided many supports, at least in the memory of the widow. Rather than engaging in new roles and relations these widows still rely on their children and, in some cases, friends. They do not venture into the world outside of the traditional familial one, they underuse the resources of the society. For example, those who take jobs rarely use re-training or upgrading programs, employment agencies or other rational means developed by the complex society within which they are living to best match personal needs and skills with the openings of the labor market. Few join new clubs, develop new friends, turn to "experts" for the solution of financial, real estate, legal or even personal problems. Few even use the societal resources for undergoing and completing their grief work, a basic necessity before they can build new lives. In fact, for some, being widowed introduces few changes. Of course, there are women who are relieved by the death of the husband.

A third conclusion of both studies of widows is that the more education a woman has and the more middle class a life style she and her husband developed when he was alive, the more disorganized her life becomes when he dies, because of the interdependence between them. Simultaneously, the more education and middle class a life style she had, the more personal resources she has to re-build her life once the period of heavy grief is over. Unfortunately, many older widows do not have these personal resources.

Needs of the Elderly of the 1970's

The concept of "need" is a very difficult one to deal with and to plan public policy around because it depends on the definer and the criteria being used in the definition. The studies of Chicago area widows indicate that the definitions of need, life satisfaction, loneliness, the adequacy of support systems, etc., by the women themselves are havily influenced by their perception of reality. Human beings compare their life circumstances to others whom they judge their peers, to their own life expectations or to their life at another stage of its cycle, past or anticipated future. They then feel deprived or privileged by comparison. Several studies by other social scientists indicate that the older the woman, the more privileged she feels, with some exceptions, if she still has a husband living with her, has sufficient income to cover what she considers to be her necessities, has contact with at least one child at a frequency she judges reasonable or justifiable, etc.

There are some very lonely and unhappy elderly, but there are not as many of them as we expected to find. Many of the unsatisfied ones are recently retired or widowed or angry about some of the circumstances of their status change. Often they suffered a strong drop in social status or income in recent years. However, human beings are very adjustable. Reading some of the interviews we are constantly surprised at the life circumstances which these people have passively accepted. They really are the invisible minority because they assume that life is just as what their life is, and that change is not possible or even threatening because change means trouble (Lopata, 1973b). Others wistfully

explain that they are relatively satisfied with life, but they wish they could have trained for an occupation, or for a different occupation. They do not demand many things, however. It is the younger women and men, used to organizing their lives and to demanding their rights, who most often stated their expectations from other during our interviews. This does not mean that there are no elderly Americans demanding rights, only that they are usually not the most disadvantaged.

The question to which a community agency must address itself is simple: Do we as a society have the obligation and the right to decide for some of our members what they need and what we must provide them? Do we wait for a protest group to come to us to try to change what it defines as a wrong? What do we do with the knowledge that many of the Chicago area widows lead very restricted lives, adjusting step by step to externally or self-imposed restrictions, withdrawing from discomforting social relations, preferring to eat very sparsely rather than trying to fight the buresucracy whose representative answers the telephone in a way that makes them feel totally incompetent to ask a vital question.

There are certain acute needs that most of the elderly face in modern American society: behavior or problems of a mate if married -- such as a loss of a job or illness or drunkeness or inability to relate to him or her; behavior or problems of children and their families; own fears and inabilities to operate in a world suddenly changed through the behavior of others or through events such as death of a personally important person. These needs and many others can be ignored, met with one's own efforts, met with the help of people already in existing support systems or met by a community or society which feels that they cannot be privately met. The meeting of such needs by the community or society requires not only action programs, but the willingness of the "client" to accept both the intervention and the proposed solutions to the problems. Often the intervention and the solutions require breaking down barriers of habit, suspicion, inability to cope with anything new, or a "protective" cocoon imposed by the immediate circle.

I feel that any new action American society as a society on the governmental level, or through community voluntary activity, undertakes to help meet the needs of widows should be directed first and foremost at resolving acute problems but that then it should be directed toward a slow and carefully thought-out re-examination of the relation between its obligations and right vis-a-vis the older person. In the meantime, we should listen to what they tell us they do need, assuming that in all probability forthcoming generations of the elderly will define their needs very differently.

I do not know much about what older women who never married, who are divorced or separated, or those who remain married or remarried define as their needs, and I know relatively little about the older men in any marital status, but it is probable that these historical generations of people 60 years of age or over are often facing similar economic, service, social and emotional problems although their personal approaches to dealing with them may be quite different. The needs which the elderly face, both acute and chronic, are influenced by the sources and amount of income at their disposal at any time and the social class life style they can maintain. Most of the elderly who report problems have multiple needs:

1. Financially, they are dependent upon very limited sources of income achieved by themselves or their spouse through minimally rewarding jobs performed often under unhealthy conditions. Their social security is often so low as not to raise them above the poverty level.
2. Educationally, in that they lack training in skills which would make them marketable, even in part time jobs. Widowed usually when the spouse was still working, or retired when still capable, only the better educated among them are able to be in the labor market at any time thereafter. They also need training in basics of living in an urban setting.
3. Residentially, their needs are to be integrated in new ways in neighborhoods in which they remain, but without a spouse or in neighborhoods to which they move.
4. Service needs include many levels of assistance: transportation, reassurance of safety in the streets and in the home, legal advice if they must make major purchases or agreements, employment search training, care in illne-s, help with children or disabled family members, information provision as to available resources, grief work, emotional support, household maintenance during spouse's illness and right after the death in the case of women, and continued in the case of men.
5. Social needs are strong, especially if this is the first time they have been alone, or without a paying job. They need regularly expressed interest in their welfare, visits during the first year of bereavement or retirement by someone who can spot problems, help by listening or providing knowledge. The visitor can arrange for other social contacts and services through churches and voluntary organizations.
6. Emotional needs are high, as mentioned above, particularly after the initial period of focused attention by friends and relatives following some disruptive event; extremely important to many elderly are the feelings that they are coping and coping well, of being competent, satisfactory "adjustment" is usually signified by feelings of independence and freedom, but that takes time if past areas of competence are removed.

Suggestions to the Ministry

The finding during the study of the support systems involving widows that church related personnel and organizations were almost totally absent was somewhat of a shock to those of us analyzing the data. The widows had 195 chances to mention some person or group related to the American religious institution as part of their economic, service, social and emotional support systems the year prior to the husband's fatal illness or accident and now. In addition, they were asked who helped them most during the husband's illness or during the funeral and immediately after. Finally, they were asked about people who helped them build a new life after the major grieving was done. In none of these areas did the ministry appear in any significant frequency. Voluntary organizations were also evaluated negatively when asked about directly, or never mentioned in the listing of contributors to the support systems. A few women mentioned groups such as Parents Without Partners, or a church group which provided food during the funeral period. Co-workers appeared more

often as part of the emotional support system than did co-members of religious groups. The church did not even appear very often as a source for meeting friends. Luckily, most of the widows have children who are available for supports, and the more educated have friends met in a variety of sources, often in the neighborhood.

It seems to me that the main reason for the failure of the religious community to provide supports to widows, and probably to other people whose lives become disorganized through a dramatic event such as a death of a spouse, illness, retirement or geographical move, is that they have gotten in the habit of passively waiting for people to come to them. A major problem of many elderly, as stated several times before, is that this is exactly what they cannot do for a variety of socio-psychological reasons based on past inadequacies and current inertia. The people who most need social integration are the ones least able to insure it for themselves. In addition, we found a great deal of ignorance and misinformation on the part of the Chicago area elderly, particularly, the widows, as to resources available in the community. I would therefore recommend that each community organize itself in two ways to help people whose lives have become disengaged through traumatic events; through the development of a community information referral system designed especially for this population, and the development of neighborhood networks.

I do not think that it is the function of the minister to serve as the connecting link between people in the neighborhood and its services but I would recommend that the networks be formed by a paid (or maybe even unpaid) volunteer whose job it would be to collect and disseminate information on community resources, to develop the network from representatives of existing organizations and to keep track of the new elderly in an area or those whose lives have become disorganized for a period of 13 months, or one month after the first year anniversary of the disruption. Working out of a hospital, school, church or even a home, and possibly him/herself also being elderly, the volunteer must first be informed as to community resources, trained to help build competence and confidence, rather than just dispersing sympathy and advice. The volunteer would need a network of people of both sexes and all marital statuses who culd serve as temporary links between the person whose life has become disorga-ized by any of such events and the society, until new lines of connection are built. He or she can develop a regular schedule of visits, checking on progress, helping to solve problems, creating new contacts and relations. The voluntary associations are not doing this badly needed activity and many elderly are "difficult" to interact with but need contact or they slip into relative isolation.

The neighborhood networks should make a point of using existing agencies for the benefit of their "clients" but they must seek these people out. The services will vary considerably by the needs of the client. Some persons need mainly to be educated to life in the urban center, trained for full- or part-time jobs and helped to feel useful. The network should definitely cut across organizational lines as so many of the difficult cases among the life-disrupted elderly are not members of any social group and are thus invisible to them. They often refuse to go to governmental agencies because of the negative evaluation

of "charity" but will blossom if treated as equals by people who are not judgmental. As in the case of the "Widow-to-Widow" program in Boston or the many "hot-lines" being organized in cities, a telephone emergency service manned by the elderly, and often by people who have gone through similar experiences, has been tried with great success. The trouble is, it must be manned during the "bad" hours when the life disorganized person feels most lonely, missing former associates and schedules. In the case of the widowed or divorced, this is apt to be during nights and weekends.

By the way, those respondents who reported help from the ministry usually mentioned prior or repeated contact.

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MINISTERING TO THE RELIGIOUS NEED OF THE ELDERLY: PASTORAL OPPORTUNITIES

By Wm. B. Oglesby, Jr.
(University of Theological Seminary
of Virginia)

Our gathering here to consider the meaning of aging, and particularly today to contemplate the factors involved in pastoral ministry to the religious needs of the aging attests to the urgency and enormity of the task at hand. We do not need to be reminded of the spate of books and studies that have appeared in recent years dealing with the problems of aging. Indeed, as we meet here, it is certain that other groups are gathered for the same or similar pur-oses, or are preparing to address themselves to the matter. The statistics on aging have become so familiar to us as to be oppressive. We are well aware of the fact that all of us are living longer and that we are fast becoming a nation of persons whose age brackets are skewed toward longevity.

It is appropriate that we address ourselves to the task with some sense of anxiety. While it is clear that we consider the matter as a "problem" out there to be confronted creatively, we are continually beset with the inner awareness that we are talking about ourselves. No one here is so far removed from the matter of age that there is no relative or friend today who is not encountering transition, distress, even hopelessness as a consequence of having lived beyond the three score years and ten. And at a deeper level, we are caught in the reality that tomorrow is just around the corner for each of us. How long will it be that we who are contemplating the factors in aging will ourselves become part of the statistics and find ourselves engaged existentially in those dimensions which we still have the luxury to discuss in the contemplative situation of this symposium?

The matter is made more pressing precisely because we have known for some years that something must be done, but have been generally hesitant to confront the situation head-on. Who among us has not been stirred to concern in the past two decades only to find that all too often we returned to the pressing affairs of our own lives and hoped that someone would deal with the matter of aging, or that it would go away? To be sure, we knew it would not; and now it becomes more and more difficult to escape the facts. We drive to work each day passing newly constructed "retirement" homes, and nursing homes, and inwardly shudder as we contemplate what goes on behind the walls. I still cringe when I remember a word written by Edith Stern. "Unlike some primitive tribes, we do not kill off our aged and infirm. We bury them alive in institutions. To save our face, we call the institutions homes -- a travesty on the word. I have seen dozens of such homes in the last six months --

desolate places peopled with blank-faced men and women, one home so like the other that each visited seemed a recurrent nightmare."[1] It is no comfort to me to recall that this was written nearly thirty years ago! The enormity of the situation today makes the time of which Edith Stern wrote pale into relative insignificance.

To speak thus is to speak in generalities which in one way or other impale us all. But my responsibility here is to deal much more specifically with ministry to the elderly. It would be comforting to be able to paint a glowing picture, to point to the work of religious groups as signal exceptions to the general situation. But such is not the case. Over a quarter of a century ago a detailed study was conducted by Paul Maves and Lennart Cedarleaf dealing with older people and the Church.[2] I can remember reading this study and contemplating ways whereby I and the congregation for which I was responsible might implement some of the constructive procedures suggested. A little over a decade later Robert M. Gray and David O. Moberg made a significant contribution to the matter of ministry to the aging in their book The Church and Older People.[3] There are, of course, many others; I cite these two since they called our attention to the situation some years ago, and we have yet to respond with anything that can be considered a widespread and truly significant strategy. Lest I be misunderstood, let me say that I am grateful for what the Church has done and is doing, and there are notable efforts on the part of many to provide housing and services for the aging as well as religious ministry for those who make up such a growing segment of our population. The fact is, however, that these efforts, commendable as they are, have only scratched the surface. For every person who has benefited from such programs there are many others who have yet to experience any meaning in the later years. So it is that we can rejoice in what has been done while we deplore the scope of that which remains undone. It is as though we are always being outstripped and find ourselves with more to do than we can accomplish with our present resources and energies.

Is this too pessimistic a picture? I think not, even though I am painfully aware of how easy it is to view with alarm and bewail the evils of our time or any time. Basically, I am not a pessimistic person; quite the contrary. Yet realistically, I do not believe it serves our purpose to avoid the harsh realities, particularly when these realities involve the lives of people who often find themselves reduced to meager existence by circumstances over which they have little if any control. So it is that I welcome this particular symposium as an opportunity for us to join with many others in searching for constructive and creative answers to this situation. As a minister, I am convinced that the resources of faith are crucial in this as in all human endeavors.

My purpose, then, is to set forth some factors which I believe essential for ministering to the religious needs of the elderly from a pastoral perspective. Because of the time limitation, I shall make no attempt to spell out in detail the implications of these principles, although indices are noted from time to time. Nor do I consider these principles exhaustive; it is certain that someone else addressing this topic would discover aspects not covered here. If what I say can be

suggestive, then the purpose will have been served as together we pool our resources toward rendering a more creative ministry to persons who move toward the evening of life.

Two final words of introduction. In the first place, I am constantly aware of how tenuous any definition of "elderly" proves to be. Our tendency now is to speak of "aging" rather than "aged," recognizing that every person has akind of inner "time clock" which does not slavishly follow the chronological passage of time. Who is elderly? Am I, at three score? There are those who would think so! My mother at 88? Doubtless more would think so. I remember my father saying that an older person was someone twenty years your senior. With a twinkle, he would say, "At 30 I knew some older people in their 50's; at 40, they were in their sixties; when I reached fifty, there were quite a few older folk in their seventies; after I reached sixty, there were not as many older people around, but still quite a few in their eighties; at seventy, there were even less older people, and when I turned eighty, it seemed that there were practically no old people left anymore!" You can recognize the wisdom in the whimsy. All of know people who are "old" at fifty, and others who are "young" at seventy-five or eighty. For the purposes of the discussion here, I am arbitrarily thinking of persons over 65 since that age has become a kind of cultural cutoff point in regard to retirement. Statistically speaking, it is between 65 and 70 that the transition occurs as persons find themselves moving into new identity and functional roles. Whether or not they think of themselves as "elderly" is fundamentally a personal matter.

In the second place, it is a-propriate to examine the meaning of ministry in this or, for that matter, any setting. It would not serve our purpose to engage in any extensive disquisition on the theme. Even so, it is important to understand that ministry is a function of the people of God and not the sole prerogative of the clergy. It is in the "bearing of one another's burdens" that we fulfill the essence of our spiritual allegiance.[4] Our "love for one another" is the hallmark of our own commitment of faith.[5] Our "giving the cup of cold water" in the Name of the Lord is the manifestation that we are participants with Him in reconciliation and restoration.[6] The clergy exists for the well-being of the faith community, not the other way around. We are those who engage in ministry and enable others to engage in ministry also. Thus, while I will be speaking of pastoral opportunities from the viewpoint of the clergy, my intention always is to see this kind of ministry in its larger dimension. Since the next symposium deals specifically with "Congregational Opportunities," it is appropriate here to focus on the work of the clergy always bearing in mind that such work is meaningful only in the context of the faith community.

II

In considering the ministry to the religious needs of the elderly from a pastoral perspective, it would be comforting to discover a sequential list of topics to be explored so that one might begin at the beginning and move on through various steps until arriving at the goal. The fact, of course, is that such is not possible. Inevitably, we have "already begun," and the experiences and impressions already gained

affect the nature and effectiveness of our ministry. So it is, that wherever we start, we are already presupposing many factors which will, themselves, have to be explored if we are to make progress in enhancing the quality of our ministry. One factor which is already a part of our lives but which can become much deeper is an understanding of what it is like to be elderly. Such an understanding comes, to be sure, from reading and discussion whereby we draw on the growing data gathered by those who constantly leave us in their debt. No matter how meaningful, however, this is never enough. There is the necessity, in the words of Anton Boisen, to study the "living human documents," to listen to the persons who are experiencing aging and to participate in their hopes and fears, their joys and sorrows. Hear the words of Virginia Churn and let their meaning move into your being. "Only the old know what it is like to be old. The young can only guess, and the guessing often as not is tinged with fear and revulsion for the day when one's own self will be old. Wrinkled faces, veined hands, memory lapses, energy sapped by fading health. Walking carefully, slowly, when you once stepped swiftly along the sidewalk and ran up and down stairs."[7] It is not easy to listen to the old. As Churn reminds us, the words are threatening. How is it possible to hear the negative aspects that so often emerge? Well, we know the incidence of the elderly experiencing uselessness for it is documented in every study of the aging. How hard to listen to a recounting of uselessness by a real person, since it tends to tap into our own feelings of uselessness in the very process of listening! How quickly do the words of negation rise to our lips, the hollow words of reassurance, the rejecting words of prescribing different feelings, exhorting the person to see things positively because it becomes too painful for us to stay long in the presence of such feelings! The same is true of words describing loneliness and depression, the sense of hopelessness and helplessness in the face of a future that is bleak. Who among us has not felt overwhelmed in such experiences, unable to be reminded of our own doubts and fears as we face life, eager to gloss over the pain of the person so that our own pain may subside? And what if the words take on the texture of bitterness, of anger, of frustration, of resentment? How difficult it is to deal with one's inner reaction of irritation or hostility? How often does the unwelcome feeling emerge that if the person were just a bit more even tempered, then it would be likely that more people would call? Or when, perhcance, the words tell of death, how hard are they to hear? If the feeling toward death is fear, anxiety, dread, what nameless terrors arise within us which cannot be ignored; and if the feeling toward death is eager anticipation, the desire for an end, or even a pleading that the end be hastened, what moral struggles emerge, what devastating ambiguities beset, what personal threat confronts us? We may be shocked to read Simone de Beauvoir's The Coming of Age[8] or angered to be confronted with Robert N. Butler's Why Survive? Being Old in America[9] or discouraged by the picture painted in Senator Charles H. Percy's Growing Old in the Country of the Young;[10] but a book can be closed and put back on a shelf. It is not so easy to dismiss the person with whom we are conversing in an actual encounter.

What I am saying is obvious. The necessary ingredient for any effective ministering to the religious needs of the elderly is to understand who they are and where they are and nothing can substitute for firsthand engagement. Indeed, the essence of the Judeo-Christian faith

is the taking of initiative in moving toward the persons in distress. The word of the Lord God in the Garden collowing the temptation is paradigmatic. "Adam, where are you?"[11] There is a sense in which the entire biblical narrative is a commentary on this theme, the search for Adam. The ancient prophet "sat where they sat"[12] as a prelude to ministry. Jesus identified his ministry as that of one who came "to seek and to save."[13] Of course, this understanding is never an end in itself. Cognitive knowledge, however important, is never enough for genuine ministry and healing. Rather, the intent is toward a realistic awareness of where the person is so that there can be a genuine meeting,a true encounter, a reestablishing of broken relationships, a basic "being withness" that shatters the loneliness and brings new life. We shall return to this theme a bit later.

Alongside of -- and, indeed, a necessary part of -- understanding the elderly person is the minister's own self-understanding. At every point the capacity to relate in a fashion that will be of benefit to the person is a function of one's ability to get in touch with the inner feelings and reactions to the emotional impact of the encounter. How many pastors have found that their ministry is ineffective precisely because they were unable to relate to the elderly parishioner in terms of that person's needs? Not that they did not go to the person in a geographical or spatial sense; indeed, they were there, whether by sense of duty or a genuine desire to serve. The problem lay in that they found themselves unable to go to the person in an emotional or spiritual sense. So it is that geographical proximity, important as it is, can never be a substitute for personal proximity. As I say these words, I am reminded of a Roman Catholic Mother Superior whom I knew some years ago. She had a marvelous capacity for "being with" a person, for bridging the gap with a healing touch of love. That she could do this when in direct encounter was readily apparent; but she could do it even when the person was far away. I have heard her on the phone to a person in a distant state say, "I want very much to be present with you just now as you pass through this experience." And across the miles there was an establishing of personal bonds which transcended the spatial separation and brought the two together in meaningful community.

Such a capacity is not easily attained, as every minister can attest. One's own personal needs continually interfere and block the movement toward the other. The wretched tendency is continually to exhort the other person to come to where the minister is rather than the other way around. Thus, all reassurances, all exhortations, all admonitions, all prescriptions of feeling belie the Incarnational model of moving to the person, of taking upon us the form of the other.[14] This is not to imply that the minister has no needs, that it is possible to be divested of fear, anxiety, loneliness and the like. It is to say that unless the minister has some opportunity to deal with these genuine needs then the relationship with the elderly or anyone else, for that matter, will inevitably suffer. The implication is clear. Every minister has need for a basic support system, some person or persons with whom to confer at every point. What fashion this conference will take is not as crucial as that it take place. Whether it be focused on examination of verbatim material, or exploration of feelings encountered in conversation with an elderly person, or wrestling with resistance stirred by unnamed

threats in the performance of ministry, the essential factor is the opportunity for having some of the personal burden borne by another. Put in simplest terms, only those can be ministers who have been ministered to; and the process is continuous for each encounter becomes the occasion for deeper and more pervasive exploration of the self.

The point seems so obvious as to be irrelevant for a discussion such as this. Surely, one would think, this is a patent presupposition which can be taken for granted so that we can get on with the task of ministry itself. The sad fact is that in all too many instances such is not the case. However much we who are clergy may pay lip service to the necessity for our own emotional and spiritual needs to be met, who among us does not recognize at some level or other our resistance to receive ministry? We can see that others -- our parishioners -- need someone to stand with them in time of struggle and difficulty; how often it seems to us that we should have the resources to walk through the tangles of life on our own only to realize later that such a determination is a mark not of strength but of weakness. It is, as someone has said, the occupational hazard of the ministry. And in the matter of ministering to the religious needs of the elderly it is likely to be the most telling factor in success or failure.

We have labored the point of understanding -- both the parishioner and the self -- because of its primary importance in any effective ministry to the elderly. The danger, of course, in such exploration is the possibility of becoming lost in subjectivity. A support group, as noted above, is necessary as an antidote to such an eventuality; even so, there is another factor which is essential for effective ministry and that is a constructive understanding of the meaning of aging in the context of faith. The question is, "What do we really believe regarding aging from a theological perspective?" Is it an evil to be avoided, a good to be enjoyed, or neither of the above? Does our theological heritage offer any assistance in the matter of ministering to the spiritual needs of the aging? I have contemplated the promises of the closing verses of Psalm 91 as the Lord declares his intent toward the righteous: "Because he cleaves to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will rescue him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him my salvation."[15] How do you hear the words, "With long life I will satisfy him?" How does the invalid in the nursing home, the lonely person in the retirement home, the terminally ill in the hospital who longs for death which will not come? Not too long ago as I sat with an elderly friend, she said, "There's nothing good about old age," and I remembered how many times I'd heard the same word in varieties of contexts. Browning's words in the mouth of Rabbi Ben Ezra, "Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be, the last of life for which the first was made,"[16] often have a hollow ring in our time. This is not to say that all elderly people are unhappy or miserable; all of us could cite this person or that who continues to find satisfaction in the passing years. But the cruel fact is that these tend to be the exception rather than the rule; and even when there are positive dimensions in the life of the aging these are experienced in the presence of losses that are real.

Is it possible for us to cut through the ethos of our time with a constructive and creative theology of aging, to lay hold upon and profess a word which brings meaning to the later years, to affirm the importance of every dimension of life? I, for one, believe that such an enterprise is not only necessary but possible. It is encouraging to discover movement in this direction from varieties of quarters. A significant step was taken in the spring of 1974 when a group of theologians gathered for a Conference on the Theology of Aging sponsored by the National Retired Teachers Association and the American Association of Retired Persons. The Conference was chaired by Seward Hiltner of Princeton Theological Seminary, and a report on the proceedings, papers and findings is available in the Winter issue of Pastoral Psychology.[17] I commend to you the examination of this material, and because it is readily available I will not attempt to summarize what was said and done. Sufficient to say that this sort of enterprise represents the kind of task which ultimately will undergird any genuine ministry to the religious needs of the elderly.

Although time and space preclude any extensive exploration of a constructive theology of aging, there are several factors which are essential for any responsible perspective on the process of growing old. In the first place, there is necessity for a renewed awareness of the inherent value and worth of persons in terms of their own being and not in relationship to their materialistic productivity. The personal shock of retirement, in the past ordinarily more poignant to men than to women — a situation already being equalized as more women enter the job market -- reflects the value orientation of our culture which goes contrary to the Judeo-Christian faith. Persons are loved, respected, and affirmed not for what they do but for what they are. This is not to imply that productivity is irrelevant; it is to emphasize that it is the person who is of value whatever their circumstance of life. There is no doubt that to attest to this basic tenet of human value is to run contrary to the currents of our time. Moreover, saying it does not mean that it will automatically become a part of the experiential self-concept of those who are growing older. Even so, any ministry to the elderly which does not rest firmly on this foundation is doomed from the start.

A second factor which is involved in a constructive theology of aging is the affirmation of the continual process of working through basic relationships at every stage along life's way. This is another way of saying that salvation is always a proce-s, never a static entity, The triadic love of God, neighbor and self implies not only being but becoming. Each experience, each day, each situation provides not only the opportunity but also the necessity to be forgiven and to forgive, to be loved and to love, to be reconciled and to reconcile. It is a reality which is possible only in community, only in the corporate give and take of the people of God bearing one another's burdens and thereby are enabled to bear their own burden.[18] It is a renewal which draws on and contributes to the experience of the self in relationship in which no one is always the giver while another is always the receiver.

A third factor in a constructive theology of aging is the reality of the discovery of meaning at every point in life in terms of its own inherent components. This is another way of saying that if blessing does not come now, it never comes. It is the daily bread that is enough

for the day, and the awareness that taking anxious thought for the morrow is the certain means for destroying both today and tomorrow.[19] Who of us does not know the truth in the old saying, "Man never is but always is to be blessed"? This inability to live today because of a longing for tomorrow seems almost a watchword of our time. It will not disappear because we speak these words today. It is woven into the warp and woof of our education system, our work ethic, our striving for advancement, our following the fleeting vision of blessings yet to come. How hard for us to learn and affirm that "This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."[20] And yet, who of us is not convinced that the distresses of aging are already set in the incapacity to experience the reality of grace and meaning in the present? How far we are from the words of St. Paul: ". . . I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstance I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want."[21] Not a statement of complacency; rather a ringing affirmation of the reality of meaning at every point of life. Until we come to a new and deeper awareness of this factor, our capacity to minister to the aging will be curtailed.

Finally, and seemingly contradictory, a constructive theology of aging includes the concept of hope. This is not a negation of the present; far from it. It is rather that which is based on the affirmation of the present and the sure conviction that at all points there is, in the words of Revelation, set before us "an open door which no one is able to shut."[22] This is essentially not different from the factor of being and becoming to which we have already referred. It affirms the constant fulfillment that comes in the unfolding experiences of life, the sure conviction that the changing physical capacities of aging in no sense negate the evergrowing spiritual capacity for renewal and blessing. Rabbi Robert L. Katz captures the meaning of this factor when he writes: "Life becomes an unending Sabbath for the individual attaining the years of maturity; it persists for him until the day of his death. Nothing captures the essence of the theology of aging in Judaism as does the concept of aging as the Sabbath of the soul with its rich possibilities for self-realization."[23]

III

In the light of these dimensions, an understanding of the inner experience of the aging, an increased awareness of the self on the part of the minister, and the moving toward a renewed theology of aging which sets the context for ministry it is possible to turn to implications for pastoral care of the elderly. Here, again, it is not my purpose to outline a set of rules to be followed by pastors in the performance of their ministry to the aging. Such lists already abound but often leave us lacking precisely because they concentrate on the procedure at the expense of the person. What I intend, as noted earlier, is to sketch some of the parameters inherent in a ministry to the religious needs of the elderly from a pastoral perspective. I begin by considering the one-to-one relationship between the pastor and the parishioner; following that, I move to the broader perspective of pastoral opportunities between the minister and the congregation.

In the first place, effective ministry occurs when the pastor is able to value parishioners in terms of their own identity. This sounds like altruism, but each of us here can attest that it is easier to say than do. Its meaning was brought home to me sharply when I asked one of the women students at Union Theological Seminary to tell me some of the things she has learned working with the elderly. She has spent considerable time with older people in convalescent homes, in nursing homes, in hospitals and clinics. She understands well the inner suffering of persons since she is, herself, limited by physical disability. She began by saying that for her, the purpose of ministry is "to preserve that beautiful unique energy within persons." She went on to note that it is always there, and our task is to find it and support it. She continued, "It can be when they are in real good physical health or when they're dying; they still have this same unique energy of life. It is a gift, and it is always amazing that no matter who the person is and no matter what the situation they're in, it is there. We're not supposed to go up and say, 'Hey, get your energy together!' Our pastoral opportunity is to discover it, and affirm it, and them." I thought on that and recalled how easy it is for us to attempt to impose meaning rather than affirm it. And I reflected on St. Paul's word in the Philippian Epistle to which reference has already been made, how this experience of contentment was within, not imposed. And I mused on how much patience is needed to listen to the person, not in a passive but active sence, to say by listening, "You are important," to value persons and to cherish them. And I thought how magnificent the opportunity to move into the loneliness and hopelessness of the person and to discover that loneliness and hopelessness are transformed in the relationship of affirmation and grace. Indeed, it is just here that the minister can allow the person to deal openly with approaching death and experience the sure conviction that life transcends death both in this world and the world to come.

A related, but somewhat different dimension emerged in the student's continued reflection on the nature of her ministry to the elderly. She recounted an experience which I wish I could reproduce for you through these words. In essence she was saying that her ministry was enhanced when she found it possible not to draw categorical lines between her and the person. She told of sitting with an elderly man who was dying, sitting in silence, holding his hand. And she said she found herself caught up in distinguishing inwardly herself from the man. "As I sat there," she said, "I was aware of thinking, 'he is lying on the bed, he is the dying one; I am sitting in the chair beside the bed, I am the living one.' After awhile, he opened his eyes and squeezing her hand he said, 'Thank you for dying with me.'" What a word! She spoke of how at first it pierced into her being, and her impulse was to scream, "I'm not dying, I'm not dying!" And then she knew the truth of what he was saying, and discovered the meaning and the power of participant involvement in the life of the parishioner. I thought of the words in the Philippian Epistle where St. Paul speaks of Jesus taking upon him our form[24] and how difficult this is for us to do in actual practice. The student went on to say that out of this experience she had learned the value of moving beyond the separating categories. This, she said, saved her from the tendency to say, "They are old and I am young; therefore I must make them feel useful, I must give them something new in the environment." She concluded, "One thing that aging people have taught me is that when

I don't draw those kinds of lines then my ministry is better." This is not to say, nor did she imply, that the identity of the minister is irrelevant or lost. Rather, it is to say that participant involvement in the life of the other is the factor that is essential for the continual reestablishing of the broken relationships, toward mutual discovery of wholeness.

In the third place, ministry to the elderly involves the pastor's openness to hear confession however it is couched. Those of us in the non-Roman Catholic tradition may find this word somewhat strange until we remember that confession occurs in many fashions other than the formal conversation in the Church. In essence, confession is the revealing of the self not the deeds, although deeds are often the means for self-revelation. All persons, and particularly the elderly, have the need to say who they are and where they are in order that words of love and forgiveness may be experienced as realistic and relevant to them as persons rather than simply the recitation of abstract truth. This means that confession can take the form of complaining, of fault-finding, of irritation as well as the overt delineation of shortcomings. It is here that a ministry of grace is fleshed out in a true word of reconciliation, not in condoning or ignoring the negative dimensions of life, but precisely in affirming forgiveness in the context of the negativities. Whatever else atonement means, it is certain that it represents a bringing back together of those who are separated, a breaking down of the dividing walls of hostility thus making peace.[25] This occurs in the experience of acceptance, the realization that I am loved not because I am acceptable but because of the love that comes to me in the presence of my non-acceptability. It is this which, in Paul Tillich's words, makes possible the courage to accept acceptance when we know we are not acceptable.[26]

Finally, effective ministry to the religious needs of the elderly involves a creative drawing on the means of grace which have strengthened and sustained the people of God through the ages. I think of prayer, the reading of the Holy Scriptures, the Sacraments which bring to us a sense of meaning which is not our own, that which comes to us from God, which we receive, not create, and without which nothing else matters. Yet it is not enough simply to say this, to call attention to these traditional forms of ministry. You know as well as I that creative ministry requires a responsible employment of these realities. You also know full well that the Scripture can become a word of rejection rather than a word of grace in the hands of an insensitive minister; prayer can destroy rather than restore apart from a genuine sensitivity to the person who participates in the prayer non-verbally; and the Sacraments can be profaned when taken from their proper context in the heritage of faith. So it is that we who are called to be pastors are constantly reminded both of our opportunities and responsibilities in the ministry to the elderly. These means, like the Sabbath, were made for persons, not the other way around, and it is our task to become the enablers for parishioners to lay hold on the strength of God in their proper use.

And now, a few concluding words about pastoral opportunities for ministering to the aging by means of the congregation relationships. In light of what we have said, it becomes clear that the best preparation for aging is fullness of life at every point. Thus, it is not stretch-

ing the point to say that the pastor begins ministry to the elderly by working with children, youths, adults, enabling them to experience meaning at each stage of life, to live in the context of being and becoming, to discover ever unfolding forms of fulfillment. This means that preaching, teaching, pastoral care are integral to a positive movement into the later years. We spoke earlier of developing a constructive theology of aging. My point here is not that this should be simply a formal statement devised by theologians, but a living experience on the part of all the people of God. It is an awesome task, but one which is exciting and challenging and filled with tremendous possibilities.

In the second place, we have the opportunity today as never before to think through the meaning of the Church, the congregation of the people of God. It is appropriate and understandable that we ordinarily find the locus of our attention in this connection focused on a building, a meeting house. It is proper and desirable that the people of God gather for nurture and enrichment in the corporate congregation. The trouble comes when our vision stops there. More and more of our people are unable to participate in this sort of gathering. It is one thing to bring the people to the Church, and many congregations have organized themselves for this task in a marvelous way. How is it possible for us to think of bringing the Church to the people? The idea of the "church in the house" is certainly not foreign to either the Old or the New Testament. While there was always a place of meeting, there was also the constant awareness that ". . . where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."[27] The possibilities seem limitless in terms of groups in the nursing and convalescent homes in addition to the coming of the people of God to those who can no longer move about. And the opportunities for ministering by those so confined draws on the fact that ministering and being ministered to are inseparable. I am confident that these aspects will be developed in detail in the next symposium.

IV

Ministering to the religious needs of the Elderly: Pastoral Opportunities. We come to the conclusion of the discussion realizing full well that in truth we have only started. Nevertheless, I do not bemoan this fact. Indeed, it would be an occasion for concern if this were seen as an end rather than a beginning. The fact of the matter is that you and I stand on the threshold of a marvelous adventure: that of recovering the meaning of life in all its dimensions by concentrating on our responsibilities for ministering to the elderly. So it is that we do not shrink from the task; rather we see it as a God-given opportunity to find through this exploration a new dimension in what it means to be the people of God at every stage of our existence in the Spirit of Him who said, "I come that they may life, and have it abundantly."[28]

FOOTNOTES

[1]Edith M. Stern, "Buried Alive," Women's Home Companion, June, 1947. Cited in Robert N. Butler, M.D., Why Survive? New York: Harper and Row, 1975, p. 260.

[2]Paul B. Maves and J. Lennart Cedarleaf, Older People and the Church, New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1949.

[3]Robert M. Gray and David O. Moberg, The Church and Older People, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1962.

[4]Cf. Galatians 6:2.

[5]Cf. John 13:35, I John 3:14.

[6]Cf. Matt. 10:42.

[7]Richmond (Va.) Times Dispatch, September 3, 1972.

[8]Simone de Beauvoir, The Coming of Age, trans. Patrick O'Brien, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1972.

[9]Robert N. Butler, M.D., op. cit.

[10]Charles H. Percy, Growing Old in the Country of the Young, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974.

[11]Cf. Genesis 3:9.

[12]Cf. Ezekiel 3:15.

[13]Cf. Luke 19:10.

[14]Cf. Philippians 2:1-11.

[15]Cf. Psalm 91:14-16.

[16]Robert Browning, "Rabbi Ben Ezra," Stanza 1.

[17]Pastoral Psychology, XXIV (Winter, 1975) No. 229.

[18]Cf. Galatians 6:2, 5.

[19]Cf. Matthew 6:34.

[20]Cf. Psalm 118:24.

[21]Cf. Philippians 4:11-13.

[22]Cf. Revelation 3:8.

[23]Robert L. Katz, "Jewish Values and Sociopsychological Perspectives on Aging," Pastoral Psychology, XXIV (Winter, 1975) Number 229, p. 148.

[24]Cf. Philippians 2:1-11.

[25]Cf. Ephesians 2:14.

[26]Paul Tillich, The Courage To Be, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952, esp. Chapter 6, pp. 155 ff.

[27]Cf. Matthew 18:20.

[28]Cf. John 10:10.

THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO THE ELDERLY: CONGREGATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

by Robert D. Wheelock
(Catholic Hospital Association
of St. Louis)

What we discuss in this talk is indeed serious business. The elderly for too long have been neglected by both the Government and the Church. Christians of all denominations can take some pride in the work that has been done in various regions of the country and in various areas of need. But what has been benignly neglected so overwhelms what has been accomplished that we all have cause to be ashamed.

The elderly do not need any more meetings to discuss what should be done for them; rather they need action and they need it now! We have the resources to do many things for the elderly and to assist the elderly in doing things for themselves, but too often we are content with grand meetings and White House conferences that tickle the egoes of the attendents far more than they instigate and carry through viable, pertinent programs of positive action.

Hopefully this meeting at Kansas Newman College will not join the list of meetings and conferences that inspire people to form yet another committee to take care of those "poor old souls," but which six months from now will have nothing but the committee as tangible results of the conference. Rather, let us begin now to dedicate ourselves to a minimum of rhetoric and a maximum of creative ideas that can and will be implemented to benefit the senior citizens of our nation.

Religious Responsibilities for Elderly

Perhaps the first thing we have to realize is that we, as Christians, should stop relying so much on Government Agencies to take care of human needs. Government is by its nature bureaucratic and precious little of genuine value is accomplished by bureaucracy. Christians need to realize that while they often hear of vast programs to care for the poor, the elderly, (many of whom are neither ill nor needy), as programs of actual assistance these shcemes are too often failures. But because we know programs exist, we think needs are being met and people are being served. We never bother to investigate to see whether or not the programs honestly serve all the people who need the programs. We never check to see whether or not the red tape involved does not frighten off many or simply wear them out so that they do not avail themselves of what potentially exists for their good.

It is an error, innocent perhaps but devastating to think, because a city or village has a program or center for senior citizens, or because

a particular denomination, Catholic or Protestant, has a health care facility in the area, that Christians are content to feel that they have done enough. A Christian health facility, whether for acute care or long term care, simply does not by its simple existence absolve the individual Christian from responsibility for caring for the sick, the injured, the disabled, or the aged.

The fact remains that although many cities and towns have health care facilities, the relationship between the facility and the local Christian community is very tenuous, or even non-existent, at any meaningful level. We have to realize, I believe, that any Christian health facility reflects upon the entire Christian community in the area. Catholic cannot be unconcerned about the kind and quality of care given in a Protestant hospital in their city anymore than Protestants can be unconcerned about the quality of Christian care given in a Catholic health facility. As long as people, perhaps alienated from Christianity, not of the Christian faith, or members of the ever-growing number of unchurched, look at a facility as an example of the way Christians live out their beliefs concerning the value of man, we must understand that we are derelict in our duty to Christ if we tolerate cruel, cold, heartless care delivered in OUR name, delivered in HIS name. "By their works, you will know them," is as true today as in the earliest days of the Church.

This is surely a two-way street. The Christian community, ALL Christians, of ALL denominations in the city must be involved to some degree in the work of the health care facility that is sponsored by a Christian body and, on the other hand, the facility must realize that if it wants to be identified as a Christian facility, then it must be accountable to the local Christian community. This might be a jarring concept to many health care facilities, but it is a reality nonetheless.

I would like to build my talk, today, around four aspects of ministry to the elderly, namely, the who, why, what, and how of this ministry.

Who Are the Elderly?

Perhaps the first thing that needs to be said is that many of the elderly do not need to be ministered to but rather will be our co-workers in the ministry. Under the title of elderly or aged, we find persons who are ill and others who are healthy; persons who are completely or partially dependent on others for nearly all their needs; and persons who are totally independent. Some senior citizens are very active, others just seem to exist and do little or nothing by way of an active life. Some elderly persons are in long term care facilities, others are in special retirement settings, and yet most are in their own homes which they either rent or own. These latter have been called the invisible elderly because they are not seen as elderly by anyone. In many cases, that may be healthy. If a person is reasonably well, active, and independent, he may prefer to live his life as he chooses and not be considered among the elderly. But for others, this is a trap. They appear to be what they are not. They have real needs but no one will ever query them or show any great concern for them. They feel that they cannot be

helped unless they give up all that they have and sometimes they even deny themselves the friendship and companionship of other seniors at a senior center because they are in fear of being asked questions about their income, and they perceive this as an attempt to take away their independence and put them on welfare.

"Elderly," as we have seen, is an extremely broad term, encompassing many classes and types of persons. The result is that a ministry to or with the elderly is a complex matter. Many ideas, many different kinds of programs, and many flexible individuals are needed to adequately minister to this increasing number of Americans.

Ministry: A Definition

Perhaps it would be wise at this point to mention what I mean when I use the term ministry. There can be many different definitions of ministry depending upon your particular ecclesiology. However, any way that ministry is defined, I believe, it will contain these three aspects: (1) it makes real, concrete, tangible the (2) special presence of God in the world (eschatological presence, and (3), this is done precisely in the name of the Christian community. In this sense, all Christians are called to ministry -- there are no such things as laity if the term is meant to denote a second class level of existence, or an uninvolved person who does not know much.

All Christians are called to ministry in the sense that all are called to truly know God and His Christ; to speak and to act in a way that proclaims God and His Christ to the world around them in a way that leaves no question but that God is alive and present among us, and finally, we are all called to know our place in the Church and to actively take it. People should clearly perceive us as Christians without our ever having to tell them that we are "followers of the Way!"

Not all people are called to all ministries -- but all are called to SOME ministry. Not everyone is capable of working with the elderly. Fine, let them find what their ministry is. But for those of us who feel called by God to work in this ministry, I feel our churches should commission us in some public ceremony to this ministry and enjoin on us the obligation of doing the work we do in its name. Others will work in our name on campus, in the inner city, or in foreign missions, or in any of the other other ministries. We cannot be all things to all people, so others are sent in our name to care for the needs of others just as we care for the needs of the elderly.

Why Minister to the Elderly?

This gets to the question then of why the Church, we who believe in and are committed to Jesus Christ, must care for the elderly. We must care for them because God has spoken to us in our hearts and called us to this service. He has given us talents to serve the elderly and He will expect an accounting of our utilization of these talents on Judgment Day. We are, then, involved in ministry to the elderly because we have been called to such by God and dare not turn a deaf ear to His call.

Secondly, we are involved in this ministry because we are our brothers' keepers and we have a responsibility for and to each other. This is something we are promised when we are baptized: we take on the obligations of living the Christian faith on that day and the Christian community, in welcoming us into the fold, assures us that we will never stand alone in our hours of need. Anything less diminishes Christian community to a platitude.

Thirdly, we are involved in ministry to the elderly because we are aware of the value each person has in the eyes of God who not only placed them in existence, but continues to keep them in existence. It will always be a cause of Christian care and concern that every life be protected as long as life remains in it since it is God alone who gives, maintains, and takes away life at His pleasure.

Needs of the Elderly

Once we have seen who the elderly are, the broad range of persons and conditions that fall under this title, and once we have looked at some of the values we share as Christians concerning caring for people and accepting our baptismal call to ministry, we have to look at the needs of the elderly.

As is clear from what we have already said, many of the elderly will have minimal needs and will be more co-worker than clients. The healthy and the independent elderly, then, are a class that we will not spend much time discussing.

I cannot come to you as an expert in the needs of the elderly. I have done no massive research in this area of concern. Rather, what I feel we can say with certitude is that the needs we have as human beings do not radically change in kind as we grow older. We have social, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Any program of concern will have to have elements of all these if it hopes to be comprehensive. Furthermore, it would seem to me that needs will vary from one culture to another, from one part of the country to another. Older people in Michigan may have the very practical need for someone to shovel snow and ice from their sidewalk -- something that would hardly be a need in Florida. Rural situations will differ from the metropolitan, poor minority people will have more needs, or at least a greater degree of need, than most white middle class elderly. The point of this line of thinking is that persons who get involved in planning programs to assist the elderly need to be sensitive to many variables, and programs will have to be tailored to needs that can differ even within a single metropolitan area and certainly within a State or larger geographical area.

What Needs to be Done to Minister to the Elderly?

There are many programs to assist the elderly, such as giving discounts already in existence. Parishioners involved in the care of the elderly need to acquaint themselves with all that is presently available. The needs of the elderly here overlap with the needs of those who work with them and for them. Duplication of programs is not needed. But what one has to be on the lookout to see if the programs in existence

truly do what they say they do. Is there too much red tape? Are they situated in places where the elderly cannot get to easily? On the ground floor, or up a flight of steps? Can the handicapped get to the offices? Are there exceptions to eligibility and what are they? These and many similar questions have to be investigated.

Senior centers supply the opportunity for social activity with other seniors. However, I do not feel it healthy for senior citizens to have contact only with other senior citizens. The foster-grandparent program that matches a surrogate grandparent with a child that does not have a grandparent, is mutually beneficial. Within parishes, the conditions often exist for a small scale program such as this. Some parishes have retired business men and women who have been highly successful in life. At the same time, there are often people in the parish who need business or financial counseling. A parish sized SCORE could be set up that would help parishioners help each other and grow in their sense of parish family. Some parishes have started "Over 50" clubs which serve to keep members up-to-date on Government programs, insurance, hospitalization, and other procedures, as well as scheduling recreational and social activities. These clubs generally involve the members in all its programs, so these in themselves are projects.

Many senior citizens are capable of rendering much needed assistance in volunteer service programs of the Red Cross, and similar organizations, which offer many opportunities for the older, and even the handicapped, person to be involved. A group of persons, the elderly to be included, could look at places of entertainment to see if access is possible for the elderly and the handicapped. When ramps may be needed, the parishes could seek out their own members with the talent and equipment to provide such if the management of the ballpark, stadium,concert hall, library, museum, or other centers of entertainment, agrees. This is a much more successful and helpful plan than to simply point out to the manager and director that he is "not sensitive" to the needs of the elderly and the handicapped.

Parishes may wish to get help in devising a series of questionnaires that would surface both the needs of the elderly and the handicapped as well as the talents and abilities of people to get involved in this ministry. Possibly one of the discussion groups this afternoon could discuss the kinds of questions that would get at the needs of people and begin to design such a questionnaire. If someone knows of a questionnaire already in existence, perhaps it could be enlarged upon or improved. But a first step is to professionally find out what the needs are before beginning the planning of programs. Otherwise, we are in the trap of giving answers before we know what the questions are.

Involvement of senior citizens in parish activities, on committees, and in any way that shows that they are respected for their talents and experience is important. Sometimes special senior citizen social events, trips, etc. can be planned. The booklet entitled: Aging Person in the Community of Faith, published by The Institute of Religion and Aging, provides a nearly endless list of practical ideas for programs at all levels of needs that parishes can administer or participate in.

Physical Needs

The primary physical needs of the elderly will be for adquate nourishment, good health care, comfortable housing, and clothing. If the parish can arrange for shopping trips on a one-to-one basis, this can help tremendously in providing an adequate diet. Many older people no longer own a car and have no way of getting to the grocer- store unless someone takes them. A physician, a nurse, or even better, a dietician can be asked to develop menus and shopping lists that assure the older person a good, balanced diet. If certain stores in town will offer special prices to senior citizens, they can also be helped in this way. If a parishioner owns a store, then perhaps offering special prices to senior citizens might be his contribution to the community. Many times food markets have dented cans with perfectly good food that they discount because of the damage done to the package. The rest of the parish might be appraised of the cooperation received from merchants who particiapte in such programs and be encouraged to give these merchants their business to show their appreciation.

Eye glasses and dental care present major problems for many senior citizens. Not only do we need to search out dentists, optometrists and opthamalogists who will give their service on a volunteer-minimal cost basis, but we might get the youth of the parish to have car washes and dances, or other fund raising events to provide a trust fund to pay for these needed items when the senior citizen cannot. Parishioners could be encouraged to remember this fund in their wills and other ideas can be employed to build up the sizeable fund that is needed to provide adequately for these needs. Sometimes hearing aids are also needed, and these are extremely expensive. Again, cooperative merchants and the "fund for a full life for senior citizens" could be built up and then tapped as needed to provide these items. We cannot encourage people to read, attend plays, sporting and music events, if they are unable to see, or to hear, sufficiently to enjoy them. Nearly every high school and college have annual plays and the funds collected from the admission charges help the fine arts programs of these schools. These provide great opportunities for young and old to get together, for the senior citizens to show their support of the youngsters and for the youngsters to meet the elderly after the play. Yet, often these plays are put on to disappointingly small audiences of parents and relatives of the actors. Sometimes the pastors do not even bother to attend the plays and the sporting events in which their parishioners are leading actors or players. If we truly had a family atmosphere in our parishes, we would spend more time together rather than having so many administrative tasks, committee meetings, etc. that generally accomplish so little, considering the time taken for them.

In some situations, the elderly will need special machines in their homes to assist them in breathing, for instance, or to help them get in and out of the bathtub. These can be rented or sometimes borrowed from organizations set up to assist in this matter. Here again, knowing the local resources is important -- and being certain that the person actually receives the help is too. Occasionally, people receive bills for equipment or assistance they had thought were free or covered by some form or aid. When this happens, the elderly tend to over-react, get panicky and literally make themselves ill.

Some other practical help the parishioners could provide would be safety bars in bathrooms, non-slip decals in the bathtub, adequate lighting, carpets that will not slip or cause the person to trip, and, when and where necessary, protective door locks and chains to assure the safety of senior citizens living in high crime areas.

Physicians often say that the greatest enemy of the human body is inactivity. If this is true, then we should do all we can to offer as many opportunities as possible for senior citizens to get out and to do things. Coac hes at the schools might be asked to provide special recreational programs for the elderly. If there is a physical fitness salon in your city, you might see if they offer special prices for senior citizens and encourage the senior citizens to make use of these programs. The larger chains of health spas are very good about giving discounts, especially if you tell them that you will try to recruit regular memberships from your parish.

On the more practical side of the physical needs are: lawn care, house maintenance; snow removal;shopping and laundry; to mention only a few. Many seniors can afford to pay for these services. At the same time, many of our adolescents need employment. A program that would match the needs of the elderly with the employment needs of the youth, again would be mutually beneficial. I would feel that each of the youth involved in a program such as this should be paid for some of the work and do one or two jobs as their contribution to the life of the community. I believe that it is an error to fail to involve our youth in the full life of the parish. They have a call to a ministry now. It is wrong to wait until they are adults to involve them in Christian activity.

Emotional and Spiritual Needs

The emotional and spiritual needs of the elderly are again as diverse as the senior citizens are. In some denominations, the spiritual needs are largely sacramental and supportive. But often they do not stop there. Older people do have to confront the fact that they are aging and that their lives are growing shorter. At times, they begin to wonder if there really is an afterlife and a loving God. Guilt for past failures to live up to their Christian calling plagues them and they need to be free to discuss these doubts and guilt. They need reassurance but only after they have truly talked out their fears and doubts. Others have terrible fears about dying alone, or about becoming physically disabled. If they live in a dangerous part of the city, they often fear attacks from youth, robbery, etc. Few elderly I have ever met have had the luxury of being treated by a gerontologist. The result is that many of them, most of them, have never had a physician or nurse sit down and explain the aging process to alert them to what they might expect in regards to bodily changes. These, of course, do not always appear in everyone, so it takes a great deal of knowledge and sensitivity to know when and what to say to the elderly. But I believe that if the psychology and physiology of gging could be frankly discussed and mention made of various changes that can be expected, then aging would not be such a fearful thing for so many people. Too many senior citizens take it for granted that they will become bald, that they will lose their teeth, that they will have a cerebral accident, break a hip or have arthritis --

all olld people get these, they think. The result is that as soon as they have any pain or difficulty develop, they feel they are beginning the big slide down to a miserable existence. It is cruel not to correct such misinformation.

There are so many other ideas that could be mentioned about the emotional and spiritual needs of the elderly. Hopefully, these ideas will serve as a spark to discussion later on today of the many other needs that parishes can address themselves to. The crucial need for the ministry here is to try to develop the sensitivity to the human, the person, of those things that the bureaucratic planners can miss. Jesus is our model here. Jesus was eminently sensitive to needs and responded to them many times even before people had to ask.

How Does a Parish Respond to Needs of the Elderly?

This moves us into the idea of how we respond to needs. We respond certainly with programs, committees and people. But first of all, I think, we have to look at our own attitudes towards aging. Do we see it as a threat to ourselves? Do we dread getting old? If we do, we had better work out these ideas in our mind before we attempt to help others.

Next, we need to develop a spirit of community that is real and not just a cliché. The parishioners must see themselves as a real family, not merely as a group of people who happen to meet at the same building each week for a devotional exercise. Until and unless we have a genuine sense of community, I do not see how we can expect people to be genuinely concerned about others.

Once we have the spirit of family prevading our parishes and also between various parishes and denominations, then we can have united programs helping people because they are people and not because we hope to convert them to our faith or because of some misguided "do-gooder" attitude.

Flowing from an understanding of family is an understanding of ministry and the call to ministry that each Christian must recognize for himself. As has already been pointed out, not all are called to helping the elderly. For those who will help the elderly in long term care facilities, I feel it is absolutely necessary to have at least a minimum amount of training to prepare them for this ministry. Some facilities are truly depressing places -- others at times appear to be negligent in the care of the patients even when in fact they are superb facilities. People going into these facilities can see and smell things that they are not prepared for and be sickened at the experience. If no one is supervising their ministry, if they have no one to talk to about this, they either form hasty and unwarranted harsh judgments about the facility or they develop horrible fears of aging even though they continue to work with the sick elderly. Eventually, this takes its toll on the minister emotionally and the patients pick up a feeling that they are this person's "good work" rather than their loved friend. None of us would want to be looked upon as the former. Surely we have to learn to accept help as well as to give help. We need to hear a sermon now and then on this topic, but at the same time no one would want to feel that a person has

to grit their teeth and summon all the courage they can in order to visit us and to minister to our needs.

One aspect of ministering to the elderly in general that can be easily overlooked, is the need that many Americans have to learn to use their leisure time. It is pathetic to see the number of people who do not know how to relax, who cannot enjoy a really good book, a concert, a ballet, a play, a trip to a museum or art gallery, a simple walk or drive in the countryside or, for that matter, downtown just to see all the action of people busy shopping. I spend a good deal of time observing people in airports. It is fascinating to see the range of activity and emotions in an airport. The happiness of the family who has a loved one returning from college, the grief of someone flying in for the funeral of a relative, the boredom of the salesman who logs thousands of miles annually, the exhaustion of someone returning from an overseas trip, the confusion and/or fear of the person who has never flown before. There are so many feelings and situations that one could easily write a book on people-watching in airports. But it is also sad to know that many people come to a place like the airport, zip through and see nothing. They have eyes but see not, and ears that hear not. So too, many Christians cannot enjoy the simple beauties and pleasures of life because they just are not open to them. I am amazed at the number of professional people who are completely bored after a few days of vacation and cannot wait to get back into the daily pre-coronary grind. Old age, if that includes retirement for these people, and if they live that long, is going to be a dreadful non-existence unless they learn to use leisure time as a Christian should be able to use it.

Of special concern to our parishes should be the abandoned, friendless elderly. Some of these will be found wandering aimlessly on the streets of any fairly large city. Others are in county and city institutions, while still others are in local long term care facilities. The tragic truth is that when these people die they are not even given the services of a prayer unless there is someone to claim the body and pay burial expenses.

Among Christians of the Catholic faith, it is especially repugnant to think of not having the sacraments and a burial Mass. All Catholics want this service performed for them, and I would imagine many other Christians would also want a minister of their faith to say at least a prayer for them if they did not have an actual church funeral. Yet the fact is that is a person dies and there is no one to claim the body and pay funeral expenses, the body goes either to a medical school for dissection or to the morgue and eventually on to a pauper's burial at a place and time convenient to the city, state or county that had cared for him. Could we not seek out such people and adopt them? Could we not be certain that they are a part of our family while living and get parishioners to form genuine friendships with them so that when they die there will at least be a small group of mourners and someone to provide for a Christian burial service for them? If <u>you</u> outlived your friends and relatives, what would you want for yourself? Can we give less to our brothers and sisters who are lonely and abandoned? Granted, it may take tremendous character to form a friendship with some of these people. Some are curt, unkempt; some are not even always in touch with reality.

But we have experienced that marvelous things can happen when someone cares and takes the time to work with even the profoundly disturbed. A little genuine love and concern and the power of God working through us, can do marvels even for people on whom others had given up.

Parishes should be happy places that show that religion is healthy. They should be centers of activity and that not simply for the pastor and a few parish staff. Rather the whole parish should be involved, the buildings should be busy night and day, day in and day out. There really seems to be no lack of people truly wanting with all their being to get involved in the work of the Church, willing to dedicate their time, money and talents to the ministry that they feel called to. But too few parishes have a vision of genuine, authentic ministry that extends beyond that of the ordained minister. So many pastors are overworked today because they are attempting to be the receptors of all calls to ministry within the parish -- something that is neither physically, emotionally nor theologically possible. We need to involve everyone and take the load off the few hardy faithful whom we always call upon to do everything.

This will not be accomplished overnight nor easily. Many Christians want to feel completely complacent with simply attending worship services and living their own ethically responsible lives. But there is more to religion than not doing evil -- there is the positive aspect too. I admit many pastors need to do a complete turn around in their thinking to accept the idea that others are called by God to ministry and to the responsibility for that ministry within their parish. Both pastors and parishioners need to be sensitized to this idea which is as old as Christianity itself. Somewhere along the line,we got so taken up in building our own kingdom that we nearly forgot that Jesus gave us the vision of the kingdom here on earth and entrusted us with carrying out His plan. It is time that we return to doing the Lord's work and seeking His glory, rather than our own or what is comfortable for us.

Summary

The opportunity for congregations to respond to the needs of the elderly are unlimited. The purpose of this talk is to jog ideas and the tremendous store of creative thoughts that are in your minds. During the past three weeks, those of you who have been able to attend all three sessions have undoubtedly heard many ideas, many concepts and programs and can now begin to pull together the benefits of this month of study and discussion and to plan and to carry out actions that will change the level of care and concern for the elderly in our communities.

Only the naive would see this as a simple task. Before we can even begin to act, we have to change the thinking of many persons and perhaps even our own. This is never easy. Some pastors will be unalterably opposed to any public ministry to the elderly in the name of their parish unless they personally run the show — a job for which many may not have either the time or talent. Some of the elderly will initially resent even the best efforts of the parishioners because they will see themselves as the objects of charity. Money will be needed to support the programs and to purchase equipment. People who truly feel called to this ministry will have to be recruited, trained, and hopefully some-

how commissioned by their pastor to carry on this work in the name of the congregation. The needs of the elderly will have to be surveyed and appropriate responses drawn up. A means of keeping the parish informed on the progress and problems of the ministry will have to be devised and an accounting of the ministers given to the congregation.

All of this can seem like an overwhelming task. Yet, the speakers and programs of the last three weeks have given you the skills needed to begin and/or to continue to improve what has already been started. With God's help and a firm spirit of determination, you can make this ministry functional. I trust that the rest of this day can be used now to tie together the entire month of workshops into a viable and appropriate program for the congregations you represent.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Chaplain and administrator, educator and author, Seward Hiltner pioneered in bringing new depth and breadth to the ministry through his work in pastoral theology. Dr. Hiltner is professor of theology and personality at Princeton Theological Seminary and Edward F. Gallahue Consultant on Religion and Psychiatry to the Menninger Foundation. He is the author of Ferment in the Ministry, Preface to Pastoral Theology, The Counselor in Counseling, Pastoral Counseling, and Self-Understanding, and co-author of Constructive Aspects of Anxiety and The Context of Pastoral Counseling.

William B. Oglesby, Jr., a native of Mississippi and father of two, is the Marthina DeFriece Professor of Pastoral Counseling at Union Theological Seminary (Virginia), and serves as President of the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education. In a-dition he serves as diplomat, American Association of Pastoral Counselors; President of the Board of Directors of the Virginia Institute of Pastoral Care; and was visiting professor of Pittsburg Theological Seminary and Ruschlikon, Switzerland. He received his A.B. from Austin College, his Th.M. from Union Theological Seminary (Virginia), and His Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. An ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, he spent ten years in pastorates in Louisiana and Arkansas, and has published, With Wings as Eagles, Referral in Pastoral Counseling, and The New Shape of Pastoral Theology.

Helena Znaniecki Lopata, Professor of Sociology, Loyola University of Chicago, a native of Poland, came to the United States during World War II. The mother of two, she received her B.A. and M.A. in sociology and philosophy from the University of Illinois, Urbana. In 1954, she completed her Ph.D. at the University of Chicago in Sociology. Lopata has taught in the field of sociology at Roosevelt University and since 1969, at Loyola University, where she also serves as Director of the Center for the Comparative Study of Social Roles. Active in numerous professional organizations and President of the Midwest Sociological Society, she has presented papers at several international conferences and is currently involved in researching "Support Systems involving Widows in non-agricultural Areas." Her publications include Polish Americans: Status Competition in an Ethnic Community, a chapter in Old Family/New Family, Widowhood in an American City, Marriages and Families: A Trans-Action/Society Reader, a chapter in Aging and Modernization, and Occupation: Housewife.

The Rev. Robert D. Wheelock, O.F.M., Capuchin, Director of Pastoral Care Services of the Catholic Hospital Association, received his B.A. in philosophy from the Capuchin Seminary of St. Mary and his M.A. from St. Anthony's Seminary. He pursued further studies at the Training Institute for General Hospital Chaplains, Washington, D.C., and Clinical Pastoral Education at Mendota State Hospital in Madison, Wisconsin. He is a certified general hospital chaplain and chaplain supervisor by the United States Catholic Conference. His publications include From Dawn to Dusk with Christ, The Department of Pastoral Care, The Updated Chaplaincy, and Health Care Ministries.

John H. Morgan, Ph.D. (Hartford), D.D. (The United Institute), is Chairman, Department of Sociology and Director, Institute on Ministry and the Elderly at Kansas Newman College, Wichita, Kansas. He has been Research Fellow in Divinity at Yale University, Postdoctoral Scholar in Divinity at the University of Chicago, Postdoctoral Fellow at Hebrew Union College-The Jewish Institute of Religion, and Summer Research Fellow at The Institute of Urban Studies, The University of Texas. He has been on the philosophy faculty at the University of Hartford and on the anthropology faculty at The University of Connecticut. Before coming to Kansas Newman College, he had served on the sociology faculties of Saint Joseph College (Connecticut) and Earlham College (Indiana). In 1973, he was elected to membership in the American Philosophical Association and a Fellow in the American Anthropological Association. His publications include Aging in the Religious Order: A Comprehensive Bibliography (1960-1975), and numerous articles in such journals of Worldview, Philosophy Today, Journal of Religious Thought, Encounter, Religion in Life, Spiritual Frontiers, and Inward Light.

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